knowledge. However, the same effort would have to be undertaken with regard to their neighbors so that gradually from one tribe to the next, it can be extended to the whole Black world.

For it is true that, however indispensable it is to order the facts concerning the Bambara themselves and to seek an internal explanation, the comparative method is necessary for the understanding of a religion. This method imposes itself with particular force in this context. The Bambara system does appear to be, on the one hand, the original synthesis of several other systems found by them on the spot at the time when they made their ultimate settlement, or brought along at the time of the great migratory movements. On the other hand this system is in a state of perpetual symbiosis with those of other Sudanese peoples, as is proved indubitably by recent observations.

At present we can already state that at least nine tribes of varying importance (1) live on the same metaphysical, if not religious,

1. In the order of increasing depth of studies, we cite the following groups: Dogon and Bambara, blacksmiths, Kouroumba (or Foulsé), Bozo, Manding, Samogo /Samoro/, Mossi, Koulé, altogether amounting to more than two million people. It is fitting to note likewise that several tens of peoples or tribes of the Sudan (in the wider meaning of the word) consider themselves of the same origin. Important rituals, materials, agents, and places reinforce this belief (see p. 2).

foundation. They have a common theme of the creation by means of a word, which is originally motionless and whose vibration determines little by little the essence and later the existence of all things. The same is true of the movement of the universe in a conical spiral which is constantly extending itself. They share the same conception of the person, as well as of the primordial duality, the expression of perfect unity. All these peoples admit the mediation by a hypostasis of the divinity which sometimes takes on the aspect of a redeemer, master of a world, whose appearance is everywhere identical. All believe in the necessity /229/ of universal harmony as well as that of the internal harmony of beings, both being related. One of the

corollaries of this notion is the subtle mechanism of disorder which we call impurity for lack of a better term, and which goes hand in hand with that of highly developed cathartic practices.

Finally, all these offer an extraordinary efflorescence—not to be called abuse—of the spoken, written, drawn, or gesticulated symbols many of which are found everywhere, each one of them being the basis for several levels of images.

We may therefore speak from now on of a Sudanese civilization whose substratum may be discerned among many tribes as it has been among the Dogon and the Bambara in particular. Under the diversity of languages and institutions is hidden the same framework of representations. It is as though each tribe had arranged the designs characteristic of its own genius on an identical canvas.

For this reason, it is appropriate to consider the present essay as a first step toward an understanding of this civilization. In the future, this vast entity will have to take its place in relation to the Mediterranean and Asiatic system. And there is no doubt that this search for its position will bring up problems of borrowings, migrations, and assimilation. And doubtless, too, an anatomy of the old civilizations which had taken refuge in the western impasse in Africa will throw a valuable light on the primitive organizations which were found in contact with each other during the high period in these regions, and which were able toeffect a union between indigenous ways of thinking and others with which we are more familiar.

It is tempting to reconstruct archaic states of humanity with the help of broken potsherds or literary shreds. In the more favorable cases, abundant texts and materials have permitted syntheses, whose vicissitudes are one of the reasons for the existence of erudition. On no occasion has anyone ever been discouraged by terrains without echoes, by the absence of the authors of texts and materials. Thus, a wealth of activity concerning the situations and thoughts of ancient times was instituted, a kind of science shrouded in silence where the spirit of research alone was alive.

Today it seems possible, in the light of new observations, to find among numerous and diverse living people, archaic forms and wellsprings common to men of another color living in another time. This does not imply that one should disregard the cautious advice given by the men of the old schools (1); but this advice rests /230/ on postulates